

Reminiscences

Thursday, April 3, 1980

The Day We Skated in the Streets of Roslyn

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I don't remember the year, or the month, or the day, but nevertheless, it was a very special day never to be forgotten. It was probably in January or February, 1917, when I was in third grade. At least I was old enough to go ice skating and took my skates to school in the afternoon whenever there was skating on the Mill Pond (Silver Lake).

There was already plenty of snow on the ground and the ice was thick on the pond when we had another snowstorm which turned to rain in the night, followed by a quick freeze. By morning the rain had frozen solid on the wet snow so that there was a thick crust of ice, not only on the fields and lawns, but on the roads and walks as well.

When I started off to school I could hardly stand without falling. With great difficulty I was able to break through the crust and slip and slide to the schoolhouse. When I got there I discovered that there would be no school that day for only those who lived nearby had been able to get there. Those who lived at a distance had either given up or stayed home. Some of the village children had already put on their skates and were skating in the street in front of the school house and along the entire level area from Bryant Ave. to East Broadway.

I hurried home to get my skates, slipping and sliding all the way. It is very difficult climbing a hill covered with ice. After much struggling I arrived home. I was very careful to tell my mother only some of the story for I did not want to be told it was too danger-

ous to be out. I wanted to get back to the village and enjoy the fun. I was successful with my story and soon left the house with my skates. I got down our hill all right, through the path I had already made, to Remsen Ave. I sat down on the crust and put on my skates to skate down to the village. Have you ever tried to skate down a hill? It is very, very difficult. Nearly impossible.

I can remember very vividly getting my skates on and heading down the hill, sliding over the clear hard ice on the road. I rapidly gained speed. I had no trouble standing up, but I was aware that if I stayed on my feet much longer I'd be too scared to fall down.

Maybe, I'd even be going too fast for my mother to see me if she should be looking out of the window. Perhaps too fast for anyone to see me. I was too scared by now for any further speculation. I crouched down to a sitting position. I let my skates slip out from under me. I dragged the heels of my skates trying to slow me down and to steer myself to the side of the road so that I could crash through the crust and stop. I succeeded in doing this, took off my skates and walked down the remaining part of the hill in the path I had made earlier.

On arriving at School St. (the former name of that part of Old Northern Blvd. between East Broadway and Skillman St.), I put on my skates again and joined the others skating in the street. You may ask, "Where were the automobiles?" Perhaps I have failed to explain that the road was covered with ice. The snow in the fields and yards was covered with



OLD NORTHERN BLVD., formerly School St., is blanketed with snow on a bright day in the early part of this century, around 1910 or 1915.

a heavy crust of ice which could be broken through by jumping on it, but in the road and sidewalks the rain water was frozen solid on a thick base of hard packed snow.

Where were the snow plows and sand trucks? This was before such things as plows and sanders, as we now know them. Our roads were not plowed. Only our sidewalks

were plowed. This was done with a wooden plow, triangular in shape, weighed down with large rocks and pulled by a single horse. There were, at best, few automobiles in Roslyn then, and they did not go out when there was snow on the roads. Automobiles were often put in storage for the winter and were usually housed in garages.

There were no horses either on this special day. Horses have great difficulty walking on ice unless they were sharp shod, i.e. have special shoes on their feet which have sharp points on the bottom to give the horse a grip on the ice. My guess is that anyone with a horse was spending the day planning ways to get the horse to the blacksmith shop to get it sharp shod. The blacksmiths were

struggling to get to their shops to prepare the proper horseshoes for the rush business they could foresee for the next day. So the streets and roads were clear of vehicles, self propelled, or horse drawn, for the day. Everyone who could, men, boys, women, girls and children, were skating in the streets.

We had lots of fun coasting on skates from East Broadway to the Mill Pond. There is quite a slope past Hicks' Store (the present Roslyn Post Office) to the level of the pond.

We could turn in behind the stores on the south side of the road and slide onto the pond, or we

could continue onto the milldam, stop by the fence which separated the sidewalk on the south side of the street from the pond, turn around and work our way back to School Street. It was a cold day and the temperature stayed below freezing so everyone enjoyed a full day of skating.

About noon time, my father appeared. He had managed to follow my footsteps down to the village hoping to get his mail at the post office, which at that time the building just north of the water trough at Skillman St. His morning and evening New York paper came by mail, and he put great store in getting them on time. This was before we had mail delivery and everyone had to go to the post office for the mail.

As you can guess, there was no mail that day. Father and I

started back home for lunch slowly and cautiously climbing Remsen Ave. As we got to the top of the road we discovered we had made one very bad mistake. We were on the wrong side of the road. We had climbed the south side of the road and we lived on the north side. Father was the first to attempt to cross the road. To his

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4-3-86

horror and surprise he slipped and fell on his back in the middle of the road with his feet pointing downhill, his arms waving, his hat still on his head. He must have slid several hundred feet in this embarrassing position before he was able to roll over to the north side of the road and stop.

At first I was amazed to see my father flat on his back, rapidly sliding down the middle of the road, waving his arms and trying to roll over. Then my amazement turned to laughter as I stood in the road watching him go down the hill. My laughter came to a sudden end when I lost my balance. My feet slid out from under me and I, too, was rapidly sliding down the hill on my back, waving my arms and trying to roll over and get to the side of the road. I remember looking up and seeing my father smiling broadly as I slid past him, for I, too, must have been as funny a sight as he had been. Eventually I was able to roll over and get to the north side of the road and join him.

We arrived home in time for a late lunch which I ate hurriedly so I could grab my skates and return to the skating in the village. Needless to say, I walked down the hill carrying my skates and returned on the north side of the road.